

The Covar family enjoys a trip to Garner State Park.

# ZAK COVAR BUILDS ON A FIRM FOUNDATION

## *TCEQ's Newest Commissioner, a Familiar Face*

**O**n Friday, Jan. 10, 2014, Governor Rick Perry appointed Zak Covar to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for a term to expire on Sept. 1, 2015. The commission position became available after Carlos Rubinstein was named chairman of the Texas Water Development Board.

Covar was unanimously selected as TCEQ's executive director by the commissioners in 2012. He came to the job after serving as the agency's deputy executive director since 2009 and after having served in the executive office since 2008. Prior to his move to the executive office, he served as executive assistant to Chairman Bryan W. Shaw, Ph.D., P.E. In these positions, he became thoroughly acquainted with daily operations and the highly skilled employees of the agency. Covar said that he has always adhered to a few guiding principles throughout his career: (1) apply your inner principles to what you are doing; (2) be committed and confident; and (3) be loyal to your organization and its mission.

"The TCEQ's accomplishments are due to the hardworking and dedicated employees at this agency and the active participation



**Chairman Shaw swears in Covar as commissioner, while Covar's wife Krista holds the Bible.**

of stakeholders. My commitment is to continue to work diligently to ensure that the TCEQ remains the best environmental agency in the nation," said Covar.

### Looking Ahead

Texas is a huge state with a rapidly growing population and a rapidly growing economy. Some challenges will be driven by these

factors, while others will come out of the blue. "We will continue to protect the integrity of our state and delegated programs, staying true to our mission statement by adhering to protection of public health and the environment, consistent with economic development," said Covar.

"Texas has a tremendously positive story to tell when it comes to environmental

improvements. As our state continues to be among the fastest growing, in both population and economically, our air and water quality have improved. One of the toughest challenges we have as an agency is educating the public on what we have done to improve the environment and to reach out to small business and local governments on services we offer to help ensure compliance with environmental rules,” said Covar.

“I am committed to getting our message out and to do all I can to help Texans understand what their environmental agency has done and will continue to do.”

## Water and Drought

“Texas has always had droughts, and will always have droughts,” Covar said. “But our rapidly growing population makes the effects of the droughts more serious and more widespread. We must continue to manage our resources well by conserving and extending supplies, while exploring ways we can help communities make good decisions by identifying reasonable, workable options.”

Experts from all over the agency will continue to work closely with other state agencies, city and county authorities to help public water

# TAKE CARE OF TEXAS CAMPAIGN

TCEQ photo



(From left) Covar, recording artist Kevin Fowler, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Executive Director Carter Smith at a Take Care of Texas media event at McKinney Falls State Park.

**A**s executive director, Covar revamped the agency's Take Care of Texas program and put a strong emphasis on educational outreach. “Commissioner Baker, Chairman Shaw, and I are all huge champions of protecting Texas, of the natural beauty and resources of the state, and of the necessity of preserving and conserving the state’s resources, even as the citizens use and enjoy them,” said Covar.

“As my duties take me around this great state, I’m constantly struck by the variety of the landscape and the ecological diversity that we’re so fortunate to have and to enjoy,” said Chairman Shaw. “The Take Care of Texas program is aimed at making us all stewards of this beautiful land.”

“I greatly appreciate Commissioner Covar’s leadership in reintroducing the Take Care of Texas campaign,” said Commissioner Baker. “Part of our challenge as an agency is reaching the non-regulated community and convincing them to engage on issues that protect public health and the environment while allowing our economy to thrive. The Take Care of Texas campaign allows us to reach the public in a new way and reminds us that change can start with one individual.”

Environmental protection certainly does not begin and end with a state or federal agency. Every Texan has the ability to do their part to protect our state. “I think it is important that we use our resources to promote simple ideas each of us can use to do our part,” Covar said. “Oftentimes, these simple measures save us money as well!”

“The Take Care of Texas initiative, a cooperative effort between the TCEQ and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, is reenergized because country music artist Kevin Fowler donated his talents to the effort. Fowler wrote and performed a catchy jingle on radio and television ads. He also exhorts listeners to conserve water and to do their part to keep the air and water clean by pledging to ‘Take Care of Texas.’ Almost 1,700 people took the pledge last year,” he said.

“We certainly couldn’t have pulled this off without somebody offering their generous time and effort—somebody as passionate as we are about the outdoors, and state parks, and protecting air and water, and the safe management of waste, so that we and our future generations can enjoy Texas,” Covar said as he introduced this program at the 2013 TCEQ Trade Fair luncheon and the Texas Environmental Excellence Awards banquet. 🌵

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—TCEQ Commissioner Zak Covar



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OF Texas**  
It's the only one we've got.  
**TakeCareOfTexas.org**





## Family Man First

**Z**ak Covar is a native Texan who resides in Pflugerville. He and his long time wife, Krista, are proud parents of a daughter, Ashlynn, and twin boys, Tanner and Tyler. He is very involved with his family from sports with his boys and his daughter's dance and guitar lessons to family camping trips. They all enjoy camping with their family and friends all over Central Texas, including Garner State Park and McKinney Falls State Park, just to name a couple. 🌵



(Clockwise from left) Covar poses for the annual family portrait. The Covar family loves to spend time enjoying outdoor activities. Ashlynn poses after winning the mutton-busting contest at a Wimberley rodeo. The Covar men share a love for Aggie football.

***“Water planning continues to be a lightning-rod issue as we look to sustain future growth, and our interaction with other states, and as we balance the needs of multiple stakeholders.”***

—TCEQ Commissioner Zak Covar

systems conserve and manage drinking water supplies during ongoing drought conditions.

“One important thing we will be doing over the next several years will be working closely with the Texas Water Development Board, as they begin to identify and evaluate water projects for funding,” said Covar. “We will dedicate the resources necessary to make sure we

have clear channels for rapid sharing of information, and we will make sure our processes do not become a bottleneck to their important work.”

“Water planning continues to be a lightning-rod issue as we look to sustain future growth, and our interaction with other states, and as we balance the needs of multiple stakeholders,” Covar said.



## Oil and Gas Exploration

Texas continues to be a bright spot in the nation's economy, due in no small part to the growth of oil and gas exploration and production, which has expanded largely due to hydraulic fracturing and improved techniques for horizontal drilling.

"The oil and gas industry is an important part of Texas' economy, bringing billions of dollars to the economy and hundreds of thousands of jobs across the state," said Covar. "The TCEQ's primary role in the oil and gas fields is regulating emissions and protecting air quality. We will continue to devote the resources and research necessary to make sure the air quality remains good."

Just as the TCEQ found in the Barnett Shale in North Texas, monitoring data provide evidence that, overall, shale-play activity does not significantly impact



**All three commissioners are Aggies. (From left) Bryan W. Shaw, Ph.D., P.E.; Zak Covar; and Toby Baker.**

air pollutants that the TCEQ has collected since 2000, in both the Eagle Ford and Barnett shales.

While improperly operated facilities can result in temporary, local, unauthorized emissions, there are no indications that these emissions are of sufficient concentration or duration to harm residents of the Eagle Ford or Barnett shales. The TCEQ will continue to do flyovers and work with producers to ensure compliance with state rules.

### Working with Legislators

"Because of my experience working in the legislature, I look forward to the interaction with legislators and their staffs, which is a big part of my job," said Covar. "I appreciate their interest in our activities, and I look forward to the opportunity to continue to work with them on environmental issues."

Prior to coming to the TCEQ, Covar began his career in state government as former environmental and natural resources policy adviser to Governor Rick Perry, former chief committee clerk for the Texas House of Representatives Environmental Regulation Committee, and former chief of staff to State Representative Dennis Bonnen.

### Philosophy

"I was honored to be appointed as commissioner, and I will do my best to live up to the expectations that have been placed on me, both by the governor and by the people of Texas," Covar said. "My decisions will be based on the law, sound science, and common sense. And most of all, having served in the executive office for several years, I am honored to be able to represent the nearly 2,800 dedicated employees at the TCEQ." 🌱

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air quality or pose a threat to human health. This conclusion is based on several million air-monitoring data points for volatile organic compounds and other



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